1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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Silwa

Preface

THE VILLAGE SETTING

SILWA, the village community chosen for this study, is an Egyptian village in the province of Aswan, the southern border province in Upper Egypt.[1] It lies at a distance of about 850 kilometres from Cairo and approximately 80 kilometres to the north of the town of Aswan itself. With a population of nearly 3,500, Silwa is an administrative headquarters with a Police Centre responsible for ten villages, five of which, including Silwa itself, are officially referred to as Northern Silwa (Silwa Bahari), while the other five are called Southern Silwa (Silwa Kibli).

The total area of this administrative unit covers more than 17 square kilometres along the eastern bank of the Nile, with a total population of more than 11,000. The density of population in these villages is about 700 persons per square kilometre, whereas it is slightly less than 600 for the whole country.[2] The sex distribution in the village of Northern Silwa, according to the official statistics of 1947, shows almost even number of males and females, a distribution which is similar to that in the whole country. The table overleaf shows the relation between age distribution in Silwa Bahari and that of the whole country.

Significant in the table is the fact that the figures in Silwa follow pretty closely the national figures, and that slightly less than 40 per cent of the total population both in Silwa and in the country as a whole are less than 14 years old, a population trend characteristic of peasant societies.[3] It cannot be ascertained how the malaria epidemic which spread in Silwa and in all parts of the province of Aswan between 1942 and 1945 has affected the percentages of age distribution in Silwa and might partly account for the slight discrepancies shown in the table.

[1] At present Egypt is divided into sixteen administrative provinces.

[2] *Census of Population of the Kingdom of Egypt for 1947*, Vol. I, pamphlet 1—The Province of Aswan, Govt. Press, 1951 (Arabic). The General Census for the whole country from 1947 had not been published during the writer's stay in Egypt (1951) and he had to work out figures for the whole country from the previous General Census of 1937, taking into account the increase of population from 17,000,000 in 1937 to 19,000,000 in 1947.

[3] Oscar Lewis, *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlan Restudied*, University of Illinois Press, 1951, p. 30.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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THE FELLĀḤĪN OF UPPER EGYPT

politics and even religion cannot always avoid conforming to lines of ethnic cleavage too closely to prove wholly effective instruments of mutual understanding. Science, on the other hand, is absolutely disinterested in spirit. Its discoveries are for the whole world to enjoy. There can be no rivalry between the nations as regards their respective shares in the creation of knowledge except in so far as it takes the form of honourable competition in the training of sound scholars. The time is doubtless coming when more Egyptians will come forward as investigators duly educated in the critical use of evidence; and they will be welcome.

After all, it is hard to say whether the Egyptians themselves or the rest of the world have more to gain from the study of the age-long history of Egypt and of the no less enduring individuality of its people. The country is self-contained enough, thanks to the geographical barriers that shut in the Nile Valley, to maintain a civilization answering to its own needs. Even physically the Egyptian type breeds true to itself. As often as racial intermixture occurs, the foreign strain would seem to become recessive to the point of extinction. On the other hand, Egypt is situated at the meeting-point of three continents. It presides over the junction of the Western and Eastern water-ways of the Old World. How far its influence has extended, whether by direct or by indirect propagation, at various critical periods of history is a problem, much discussed at the present moment, on which the most distant regions may be able to throw light. Any diffusion of culture, however, tends to fade out toward its circumference, and is only to be fully understood by intensive study at the centre. In the case of Egypt it is possible to grasp the complex nature of the centrifugal force thence set in motion all the more thoroughly because there is literary as well as material evidence at the disposal of the archæologist. Silent monuments, too, often form the only yield of the spade. Even pictures speak at best in riddles. Literature, however, when it came into existence in Egypt or in Mesopotamia could in some measure disclose that ethnic psychology which alone is the key to genuine history.

Nevertheless, the psychic life of a people is but partially and imperfectly reflected in its literature. Just as in the individual the unconscious part of the mind may be supremely determinative of the total character, so in a community the non-literary and

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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CHAPTER X

AGRICULTURE AND HARVEST RITES

THE wealth and prosperity of Egypt is, and always has been, dependent upon the produce of the soil, and the peasants are before everything else agriculturalists, as is also indicated by the Egyptian Arabic word for peasant—*fellāḥ* (plural *fellāḥīn*), meaning one who digs or tills. The peasants, most of whom are quite illiterate, are remarkably clever agriculturalists, and every young boy is well versed in all that pertains to the cultivation of the soil. Their methods are, for the most part, very primitive, though, of course, the present system of storing water and of distributing it over various districts has been adopted comparatively recently, and to maintain it a number of highly trained engineers are required. This book is not concerned with these modern developments, which, indeed, lie beyond the scope of anthropology, but with the ordinary work in the fields, where ancient methods and ancient implements are still largely employed, and ancient customs are still observed.

The cultivated lands in Egypt lie along either bank of the river, without any apparent boundaries, for there are no hedges to divide the fields as in England. To the eye of the ordinary traveller there is nothing to indicate where one man's property ends and another's begins. The fields are broken up into small squares, separated from each other by ridges of earth and narrow trenches. When water is distributed over a given area it is conducted through the trenches into the square plots by making an opening through the ridges which surround them. When the plots have received their due allowance of water the openings are built up again and the stream is directed to another portion of the land.

The greater number of the peasants own or hire small plots which are marked off one from the other by boundary stones stuck into the ground at intervals of six feet or more. Many a village quarrel has arisen over these stones, the removal of a neighbour's landmark being a constant cause of disturbance. If a man, for

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
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Upper Egypt

39.

The New Railway.

539x 496 [788] [103] [131]

A girl, named Dināre wishes to go to Ṭanṭa, to the tomb of Shēkh Aḥmed. (Compare No. 8—9.) At the time of the origin of this little song, the railroad from Cairo to Alexandria had probably just been built. (It was opened in 1856.) Ṭanṭa lies in the province of Ḳarbîye, about fifty-four miles from Cairo, on the railroad between Cairo and Alexandria; the capital of the province of Beḥêre, Damanhûr, lies on the same railroad, still nearer to Alexandria, something over thirty-six miles from Ṭanṭa.

Dināre 'ālet: Yamma,
ana rāiḥe-s-Seiyid azūr,
warāḥ balad el-Beḥēre
watfarrag 'al-bagūr.

Dināre said: "Mother,
I am going to visit the Seiyid
And going to Beḥēre
To look at the railway".

Circumcision.

40. 41.

539x 852 304

Most boys are circumcised when six or seven years old, and the day is always celebrated by some festivity, at which the boy is decked out and led through the streets.